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Equitable disbursement of resources to United Nations information centres

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 55/136 B, the General Assembly noted with great concern the existing imbalance in the available resources to United Nations information centres in developed and developing countries, and requested the Secretary-General to examine the situation thoroughly, taking into account all relevant factors, and to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-third session. The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

2. The Secretary-General fully agrees with the view of Member States regarding the important role of United Nations information centres in promoting an informed public understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations among all peoples of the world. For the United Nations to remain relevant, its aims and accomplishments must be explained to ordinary people around the world. More important, the story of how the United Nations works to improve the lives of people in both developing and developed countries must be told with renewed vigour.

3. As the "field voice" of the Department of Public Information, United Nations information centres promote public awareness and mobilize support for the work of the Organization at the local level. This role is critical in both developed and developing countries for the United Nations to sustain the public support it requires to be effective and relevant.

4. The Department of Public Information must use the limited resources available to it to achieve maximum outreach globally. In order to reach the widest possible audience in all regions, a balanced approach, taking into account a variety of factors, is an essential part of that effort as a means of offsetting the imbalances in technological advances and economic conditions in different parts of the world.

5. It may be argued that the costs of dissemination of public information could be reduced through an increased reliance on communications tools, such as the Internet. However, if the United Nations is to carry out its mandated public information programme, it cannot rely on one medium alone, particularly given the limitations on access to that medium in the developing world. A recent study by the International Labour Organization reveals, for example, that Africa and the Middle East together account for only one per cent of Internet users worldwide. In that regard, it is significant to note that in the year 2000 the number of United Nations information centres in Africa accounted for about 40 per cent of all United Nations information centres worldwide, and their resources have steadily been increased.

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II. Factors affecting the allocation of resources among United Nations information centres

6. The economic conditions and cost of living in different parts of the world are major factors in determining the costs of maintaining information centres. For a centre to operate effectively, it must be centrally located and easily accessible to the public. Varying real estate market conditions affect the cost of that basic requirement of all information centres. About 40 per cent of the total general operating costs of United Nations information centres is allocated to rental and maintenance of office premises. It is therefore impractical to compare total costs of the basic requirements of information centres when the objective of every centre is the effective delivery of public information programmes.

7. Staffing resources are also affected by local cost of living conditions. Each information centre has its own local salary scale, determined by the International Civil Service Commission, and staff costs vary from centre to centre even when the number of posts is the same. The salary and emoluments of international staff vary according to the level of post adjustment, determined by cost-of-living factors. Therefore, local conditions, rather than any distinction between groups of countries, play a major part in determining the distribution of resources to the information centres.

8. The information centres forge partnerships with United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies present in the host country. Therefore, the presence or absence of other United Nations offices in the host country concerned influences the decision of the Department of Public Information regarding the allocation of Professional posts to information centres. In the Department's programme budget for 2000-2001, only 35 posts in the Professional category were available for 64 information centres. Furthermore, information centres also perform non-public information functions on behalf of the Organization, including the maintenance of contacts with officials of the host country Government. In countries where there is no United Nations resident coordinator, the United Nations information centre Director is the appropriate contact with the Government. Therefore, it is likely that the post of a full-time Director in such a location would be maintained. However, given the importance of retaining professional information expertise in all regions, care is being taken, to the extent possible, to distribute Director posts in a balanced geographical manner.

9. In addition to disparities in the costs of premises and staff, the actual cost of carrying out information activities varies greatly from location to location. When in one host country media outlets are available to the United Nations information centre free of charge and in another the access to mass media is available commercially and at a high cost, the information centre in the latter country must still find ways to reach the public through commercial outlets. Similarly, when in one host country the cost of maintaining a United Nations reference library is higher than in another location, the information centre must nevertheless make available to the public the same reference resources regardless of the higher cost.

10. Under the 1990 understanding between the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the rationalization of field representation, UNDP field offices carry out certain accounting and administrative support services on behalf of United Nations information centres. Due to the absence of UNDP field offices, such services are not available to information centres in most developed countries, and accordingly it is necessary to provide staff to such centres to perform those functions.

III. Measures to strengthen information centres in developing countries

11. The Department of Public Information is continuing its efforts to enhance the staffing and general operating resources of United Nations information centres in developing countries in general and in Africa in particular. Five Professional posts were allocated to information centres in the Africa region in 1999, and three more were added in the year 2000.

12. To enhance the work of centres without a full-time Director, the Department of Public Information will continue to make every effort to appoint national information officers. These locally recruited professionals, who are required to have years of experience with the national media, have a proven

record in effectively carrying out information activities on behalf of the United Nations.

IV. Staffing resources

13. The number of established local-level posts is not sufficient to meet the need. Therefore, to further enhance the staffing resources of information centres in developing countries, the Department has hired 18 local-level staff using general temporary assistance funds. The staff appointed to these posts have contributed to the information and outreach activities of those centres. In the year 2000, the total number of established local-level posts for 64 information centres stood at 228: 44 national information officer posts and 184 General Service posts. Additionally, 16 extrabudgetary local-level posts have been made available to information centres to enhance their operations, mainly through the contributions of host Governments.

14. The Department of Public Information has pursued additional creative measures to enhance the resources and effectiveness of the information centres in developing countries. In the year 2000, several Directors of information centres in Africa were asked to serve on assignment for limited duration at other centres in order to assist in the recruitment and training of national information officers at centres without full-time Directors. In addition, these Directors assisted United Nations resident coordinators and country teams in setting up core inter-agency information groups, for which information centres act as a focal point, and guided them in preparation of their information strategies based on local needs and priorities.

15. Newly recruited staff are also sent to centres with more experienced teams for short periods of orientation and training. The Department of Public Information also periodically organizes training workshops for information centre staff in order to provide group training in all aspects of their functions, including library services, outreach activities and computer skills, including the creation and maintenance of web sites. Other options aimed at dealing with the shortage of information centre posts at the Director level are being considered, including the idea of making qualified information officers of the Department of Public Information at Headquarters available for service on temporary assignments at information centres.

V. Financial resources

16. With regard to financial resources, the allocation of resources to cover general operating costs from the regular programme budget of the Organization and host Government assistance to information centres is described in the annex. Total allocations of general operating resources by region in the year 2000 were as follows:

Africa	*Americas*	*Asia and the Pacific*	*Europe*
$US 1 825 771	$US 1 328 162	$US 1 134 182	$US 1 901 906

17. Additional financial and staffing resources were provided to United Nations information services in Bangkok, Beirut, Geneva and Vienna, as well as to the information components of United Nations offices in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Eritrea, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

18. It should be noted that the partnership between information centres and other bodies of the United Nations system in the field, particularly the office of the United Nations resident coordinator, has yielded benefits for the Department of Public Information in a number of areas, such as the cost-sharing of joint information projects, as well as with regard to common services.

VI. Government contributions

19. Annual cash contributions by host Governments have had a positive impact on the successful operation of many centres. In the year 2000, 31 host Governments provided information centres with rent-free premises, and several Governments allowed information centres to pay only a symbolic rent. In addition, 16 host Governments contributed funds in the amount of US$ 551,000 towards other operating requirements. The Government of Japan continued to make an annual contribution in the amount of US$ 200,000 for expansion of the information activities of the United Nations information centre in Tokyo. The generosity of those Governments is most appreciated.

VII. Activities in 2000

20. The past year offered many opportunities for the United Nations information centres to launch new projects and establish closer links with local partners, both within the United Nations system and beyond, in cooperation with local authorities, national media organizations and civil society. Supported by the allocation of seed money from the Department of Public Information and other sources, most information centres launched activities to promote the Millennium Assembly and Summit, and also used the "The United Nations works" campaign to reach a wider audience. In view of the number of international conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly planned for the present year, outreach is expected to increase even further.

21. The establishment of electronic mail connections with all centres has enabled the Department to increase the amount of information transmitted to the field and at the same time improve the timeliness of its arrival. Resources have been allocated to the key centres concerned in an effort to ensure that such information is disseminated as widely as possible. The number of web pages at information centres has increased to 36, and several additional sites are under construction.

22. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library works closely with Governments to increase the number of United Nations depository libraries in their countries, and the information centres support that effort at the local level. In addition, information centres are encouraged to work closely with universities and other educational and cultural institutions, and to respond favourably to as many requests as possible to provide information materials, audio-visual products and speakers on United Nations issues.

VIII. Observations

23. United Nations information centres are clearly an indispensable tool of the United Nations in disseminating messages about the work and values of the Organization to the peoples of the world. Efforts are under way to re-examine their staffing and functioning in the light of contemporary realities in order to maximize their effectiveness while maintaining, in particular, their reach in the developing world. In order to control costs for United Nations information centres in developed countries, the Secretary-General appeals to those Governments that have not so far done so to make efforts to facilitate the work of the information centres in their countries by the provision of rent-free or rent-subsidized office space, and to assist through cash contributions for information services.

Annex

Allocation of resources for rental of premises and host Government assistance

Location of centres	*Date of establishment*	*DPI posts (2000)*	*Regular budget for operating costs (allocation for 2000) ($US)*	*Rental of premises in 2000 ($US)*	*Extrabudgetary staff*	*Cash contribution ($US)*
Accra	March 1958	P-4, 5 local staff	88 703	Rent-free		
Algiers[a]	September 1963	2 local staff	40 392	2 563		
Ankara[a]	March 1975	2 local staff	54 012	7 500		
Antananarivo[a]	January 1963	2 local staff	57 540	6 500		
Asunción[a]	October 1962	2 local staff	28 660	13 000		
Athens	April 1954	P-5, 5 local staff	198 635	55 000		21 739.13
Beirut	September 1962	P-3, 4 local staff	30 675	Rent-free		
Bogotá	May 1954	P-5, 5 local staff	132 655	59 300		17 466.00
Bonn	January 1995	D-1, 3 local staff + 1 GTA	158 802	Rent-free		
Brazzaville	June 1983	3 local staff + 1 GTA	88 862	Rent-free		
Brussels	January 1975	5 local staff	276 395	93 000		55 706.43
Bucharest[a]	June 1970	1 local staff	67 310	Rent-free	2 local staff	37 726.95
Buenos Aires	November 1948	P-4, 5 local staff	132 664	Rent-free		70 140.28
Bujumbura	June 1961	2 local staff + 1 GTA	39 420	Rent-free		Not received since 1992
Cairo	April 1949	P-5, 5 local staff	60 555	1 350		1 336.64
Colombo[a]	August 1961	3 local staff	18 738	Rent-free		
Copenhagen	December 1946	P-5, 5 local staff + 1 GTA	139 345	Rent-free		
Dakar	April 1964	P-5, 3 local staff + 1 GTA	53 499	Rent-free		
Dar es Salaam	June 1961	4 local staff + 1 GTA	62 900	Rent-free		
Dhaka	August 1981	4 local staff	59 610	18 000		5 898.55
Harare	November 1982	P-5, 5 local staff	79 050	Rent-free		
Islamabad	March 1951	P-4, 4 local staff	63 480	12 318		10 238.27
Jakarta	August 1985	P-5, 3 local staff + 1 GTA	29 770	Rent-free		
Kabul[b]	October 1959					
Kathmandu[a]	April 1964	2 local staff	16 240	3 370		Not received since 1993
Khartoum	October 1963	4 local staff	38 351.75	Rent-free		
Kinshasa[a]	July 1964	2 local staff	88 862	25 650		
Lagos	May 1967	P-5, 4 local staff	141 100	4 100	1 local staff	Not received for 1999

Location of centres	*Date of establishment*	*DPI posts (2000)*	*Regular budget for operating costs (allocation for 2000) ($US)*	*Rental of premises in 2000 ($US)*	*Extrabudgetary staff*	*Cash contribution ($US)*
La Paz[a]	September 1963	3 local staff	58 468	10 180		Not received for 1999
Lima	April 1960	5 local staff + 1 GTA	183 638	36 000		
Lisbon	November 1977	P-4, 3 local staff	107 185	3 200	2 local staff	71 197.95
Lomé[a]	May 1962	4 local staff	29 172	Rent-free		
London	January 1947	D-1, P-5, 7 local staff	301 123	144 000		
Lusaka	October 1975	3 local staff	59 780	Rent-free		
Madrid	May 1986	P-5, 5 local staff	111 367	Rent-free		27 593.85
Managua[a]	July 1984			Rent-free		Inactive
Manama	November 1977		37 283	Rent-free	2 local staff	33 000.00
Manila	August 1953	4 local staff + 1 GTA post	43 395	Rent-free		
Maseru[a]	February 1979	3 local staff	33 345	Rent-free		
Mexico City	August 1947	P-5, 6 local staff	201 436	110 830		482.57
Monrovia	October 1950	1 local staff	35 434			
Moscow	April 1948	D-1, 5 local staff, 2 GTAs	219 360	45 460		
Nairobi	August 1974	1 P-4, 3 local staff + 1 GTA	57 180	18 430		
New Delhi	January 1947	D-1, 5 local staff	125 280	Rent-free		
Ouagadougou	April 1982	P-4, 5 local staff	141 011	Rent-free		
Panama City[a]	September 1984	2 local staff	50 085	Rent-free	3 local staff	
Paris	March 1947	D-1, P-3, 8 local staff	67 093	Rent-free		7 252.57
Port of Spain	January 1962	P-4, 4 local staff + 1 GTA	106 409	38 683		1 935.48
Prague	December 1947	P-4, 4 local staff	69 860	200	1 local staff	19 364.84
Pretoria	March 1996	P-5, 3 local staff	49 246	Rent-free		
Rabat	December 1962	5 local staff	83 650	14 000		
Rio de Janeiro	March 1947	P-5, 5 local staff	163 489	Rent-free		Not received since 1992
Rome	July 1958	D-1, 5 local staff	109 005	600		
Sana'a	April 1994	1 P-4, 2 local staff + 2 GTAs	53 398	Rent-free		
Sydney	November 1948	P-5, 5 local staff	129 954	60 500		
Tehran	May 1950	P-4, 2 local staff + 1 GTA	75 053	14 400		
Tokyo	April 1958	D-1, 7 local staff	446 986	225 136		200 000.00
Tripoli	January 1980		141 840	Rent-free	3 local staff	169 168.31
Tunis	May 1960	4 local staff + 1 GTA	45 970	Rent-free		
Warsaw	August 1995		76 426	Rent-free	3 local staff	
Washington, D.C.	October 1946	D-1, P-4, 6 local staff	270 658	164 350		

Location of centres	*Date of establishment*	*DPI posts (2000)*	*Regular budget for operating costs (allocation for 2000) ($US)*	*Rental of premises in 2000 ($US)*	*Extrabudgetary staff*	*Cash contribution ($US)*
Windhoek	October 1992	3 local staff + 1 GTA	67 235	35		
Yangon[a]	June 1959	4 local staff	33 090	400		
Yaoundé	October 1965	4 local staff	79 184	Rent-free		Not received since 1990

[a] Integrated centres.
[b] Not operational.